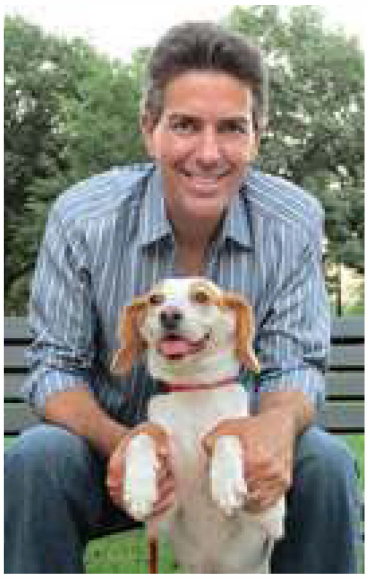
**TEN YEARS AGO,** Hurricane Katrina whipsawed the city of New Orleans and other communities up and down the Gulf Coast, leaving them devastated and reeling, with countless human and animal victims. Some wondered whether New Orleans should be rebuilt or simply left behind as a once-great city that became a victim of unfortunate geography.

Many pet owners heeded evacuation orders, when forecasters warned of trouble brewing in the Gulf in the late days of August a decade ago. They left heaps of food and big bowls of water behind in their homes, assuming that they would be back in a couple of days. But then the levees failed, the streets flooded, power and utilities were cut off and the National Guard stepped in to prevent people from returning to what had become a disaster zone.

Who can forget the images of animals clinging to rooftops and partially submerged vehicles, or swimming frantically toward rescuers in boats? Local, state and federal agencies didn't have the expertise to respond to the animal emergency. It became a race against time to come to the aid of animals trapped in homes or fending for themselves on abandoned streets.



Wayne Pacelle with his adopted dog, Lily.

We united with hundreds of other animal welfare organizations from all over the country to deliver food and water to animals stranded in homes, deploy rescuers on foot and in boats to take animals to safety and construct emergency shelters to house pets and reunite them with their owners. It was the biggest animal rescue operation in American history.

As the days gave way to weeks, Americans saw that our society's collective failure to include animals in disaster planning had condemned innocent creatures to death and misfortune, and impeded the human rescue effort. So many New Orleans residents—of every socioeconomic background—stayed behind because emergency shelters and buses wouldn't take pets. It didn't take long for the nation to recognize that we fumbled the evacuation by not accounting for the power of the human-animal bond.

Katrina ushered in a sea change in the law and our understanding of our profound connection with our pets. In the decade since, your HSUS helped to pass the federal Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act and nearly 20 state laws to ensure the inclusion of animals within our nation's disaster planning programs. We've continued to respond to disasters through our Animal Rescue Team, whose members have deployed hundreds of times, saving tens of thousands of animals from harm. And we've continued to invest in Louisiana and Mississippi by supporting dozens of animal shelters and agencies, forging results-focused partnerships with the two veterinary schools in the region, funding a prison-based animal shelter, advocating for stronger laws to benefit animals in the two states and much more.

Our nation was right to rally to help animals and people as this natural disaster bore down—and to work in the months and years following to avoid a repeat.

And while we don't view puppy mills, animal fighting rings and factory farming in the same way that we do a natural disaster, these crisis situations are every bit as menacing and life-threatening as a hurricane or a tornado. These are crises of our own making, but they are crises nonetheless.

We need to pull together to combat these problems and act with urgency, just as we do for hurricanes, floods and tornadoes threatening animals. It's our duty to put an end to problems like these, through the law, awareness and personal action—just as we did when we recognized what Katrina had wrought. Expanding the definition of crisis and responding to that challenge will define our movement's success in the years ahead.

LISA FLETCHER

*Wayne Pacelle, President & CEO*
*The Humane Society of the United States*